GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
AGRICULTURE
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:5377
ANSWERED ON:28.04.2003
IRREGULARITIES IN IMPORT OF INFECTED PLANT MATERIAL
VSM (RETD.) COL. CHOUDHARY

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Comptroller and Auditor General of India has pointed out in para 6.2 in the Report No.2 of 2002 on loss of revenue;

(b) if so, the facts of the matter reported therein;

(c) the reaction of the Government thereto;

(d) whether the Government have investigated the circumstances under which Plant Protection Officer failed to inspect imported plant material during 1987 to 2000 resulting risk of import of infected plant material into the country and revenue loss of Rs. 1.66 crore;

(e) if so, the outcome thereof; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefore?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV)

(a): Yes, Sir.

(b): As per the Report of the C&AG, import of all consignments of plant material into thecountry, from September 1987 to July 2000, without necessary certification resulted in the risk of import of infected plant material into the country and loss of revenue of Rs.1.66 crore as also expenditure of Rs.81.59 lakh incurred on the office during the period was infructuous. The Customs authorities were also at fault in releasing consignments without certification from Plant Protection Officer and the case calls for investigation both by Customs authorities and Ministry of Agriculture.

(c) to (f): Comments of the Department have already been sent to Director (Inspection),Office of the Director of Audit (Central), Kolkata. Copy of the comments is annexed. Since July2000, Customs authorities are referring the consignments and the same are being subjected to quarantine inspection.

Annexure

Draft Paragraph on `Loss of Revenue` relating to Plant Quarantine Station, Kalimpong for inclusion inCAG`s Audit Report, Union Govt. (Civil) for the year ended 31.3.01

Points of irregularities

1. From September 1987 to July 2000 all consignments of imported plant material were allowed into thecountry without necessary certification from the PPO. The gross negligence and failure resulted in the risk of import of infected plant material into the country and a revenue loss of Rs.1.66 crore for the period September 1987 to July 2000.

2. Since PPO did not carry out a single such inspection of infected plant material, a large part of theexpenditure incurred during the period September 1987 to July 2000 on his office amounting to Rs.81.59 lakh was infructuous.

Comments

The audit themselves have observed that PPO could not inspect imported consignments ofagricultural products for the period since inspection of the Plant Quarantine Station in September 1987 toJuly 2000 because the customs authorities, (for whom it was obligatory to release these consignments only after inspection and clearance certificate from the PPO did not refer the consignments to Plant Quarantine Station (PPO), Panitanki and released the imported consignments without such inspection.It was also observed by the audit that the Superintendent of Customs, Land Customs Station, Panitankiwrote to the Asstt. Commissioner of Customs, Naxalbari Division only in December 1998 seeking instructions in this regard. Due to non-receipt of instructions, the Superintendent of Customs, Land Customs Station, Panitanki did not refer any consignment of imported plant material to the PPO till July2000. Inspections by the PPO could commence only from August 2000 after these were referred to him (PPO).It is further stated that non-inspection of agricultural commodities at Plant Quarantine Station,Panitanki during the period under report was neither due to negligence nor failure in anyway on the part of the Plant Protection Officer at Plant Quarantine Station, Panitanki as the Plant

Quarantine Officerneither had any access nor any authority to inspect such consignments unless referred to them by Customs Department through an official endorsement on the body of the bill of entry/import documents. No importers or their customs agents approached the Plan Protection Officer, Panitanki with the bills ofentry during the period under reference. It is further mentioned that Customs Officers at L.C.S., Panitankidid not refer any such consignments in spite of several instructions by their Senior Officers from time to time.

Opening of Plant Quarantine Station at Panitanki was an essential step towards implementationof legal/.statutory requirements under DIP Act 1914 and provisions of PFS Order, 1989.Non-inspection of materials during the period under report was beyond the control of Plant Protection Officer (PPO) as the competent custom authorities did not refer the plant materials to the PQ Station, Panitanki, for inspection/release. However, since the inception of the Plant Quarantine Station, Panitanki in September1987, the issuance of PSCs, which is not linked with the Customs Authorities, has been continuing there as a major Plant Quarantine activity.

Points of irregularities

3. The Customs authorities were also at fault in releasing the consignments without inspection and certifications from the PPO.

4. The case calls for investigation both by the Customs authorities and Ministry of Agriculture for suchserious lapses, which, besides causing financial losses, also exposed the country to the risk of getting infected plant material into the country.

Comments

The Plant Protection Officer or other Plant Quarantine officials at Panitanki were not a faultAs Customs authorities did not refer the consignments and released them without being inspected from Plant Quarantine angle, they are responsible for the lapse on their part, though it was legal binding responsibility on them to refer the plant/plant materials to Plant Quarantine Station, Panitanki.Further, it is stated that all possible steps were taken by Plant Quarantine Officials from time to time and theCustoms authorities were approached to get the consignments referred for PQ inspection.

In view of the foregoing facts and also in the light of efforts made by PPO, Panitanki to get theconsignments referred for Plant Quarantine inspection, it is requested that audit paragraphs may kindly be dropped from the Audit Report with reference to Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Directorate of Plant Protection, Quarantine and Storage and Plant Quarantine Station, Panitanki.